

Radio Address to the Nation on Solidarity and United States Relations With Poland

October 9, 1982

My fellow Americans:

Yesterday the Polish Government, a military dictatorship, took another far-reaching step in their persecution of their own people. They declared Solidarity, the organization of the working men and women of Poland, their free union, illegal.

Yes, I know Poland is a faraway country in Eastern Europe. Still, this action is a matter of profound concern to all the American people and to the free world.

Ever since martial law was brutally imposed last December, Polish authorities have been assuring the world that they're interested in a genuine reconciliation with the Polish people. But the Polish regime's action yesterday reveals the hollowness of its promises. By outlawing Solidarity, a free trade organization to which an overwhelming majority of Polish workers and farmers belong, they have made it clear that they never had any intention of restoring one of the most elemental human rights—the right to belong to a free trade union.

The so-called new trade union legislation under which this contrary and backward step has been taken claims to substitute a structure and framework for the establishment of free trade unions in Poland. But the free world can see this is only a sham. It is clear that such unions, if formed, will be mere extensions of the Polish Communist Party.

The Polish military leaders and their Soviet backers have shown that they will continue to trample upon the hopes and aspirations of the majority of the Polish people. America cannot stand idly by in the face of these latest threats of repression and acts of repression by the Polish Government.

I am, therefore, today directing steps to bring about the suspension of Poland's most-favored-nation-tariff status as quickly as possible. This will increase the tariffs on Polish manufactured goods exported to the United States and thus reduce the quantities of these goods which have been imported in the past.

The Polish regime should understand that we're prepared to take further steps as a result of this further repression in Poland. We are also consulting urgently with our allies on steps we might take jointly in response to this latest outrage. While taking these steps, I want to make clear, as I have in the past, that they are not directed against the Polish people. We will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Poland, through organizations such as Catholic Relief Service and CARE, as we have since the beginning of martial law.

At the same time, I stand by my earlier offer to provide recovery assistance to help the Polish economy back on its feet, once Warsaw restores to the Polish people their human rights.

There are those who will argue that the Polish Government's action marks the death of Solidarity. I don't believe this for a moment. Those who know Poland well understand that as long as the flame of freedom burns as brightly and intensely in the hearts of Polish men and women as it does today, the spirit of Solidarity will remain a vital force in Poland.

Surely, it must be clear to all that until Warsaw's military authorities move to restore Solidarity to its rightful and hard-won place in Polish society, Poland will continue to be plagued by bitterness, alienation, instability, and stagnation.

Someone has said that when anyone is denied freedom, then freedom for everyone is threatened. The struggle in the world today for the hearts and minds of mankind is based on one simple question: Is man born to be free, or slave? In country after country, people have long known the answer to that question. We are free by divine right. We are the masters of our fate, and we create governments for our convenience. Those who would have it otherwise commit a crime and a sin against God and man.

There can only be one path out of the current morass in Poland, and that is for the military regime to stand up to its own statements of principle, even in the face of severe outside pressure from the Soviet Union; to lift martial law; release Lech Walesa and his colleagues now languishing in prison; and

begin again the search for social peace through the arduous but real process of dialog and reconciliation with the Church and Solidarity.

I join with my countrymen, including millions of Americans whose roots are in Poland, in praying for an early return to a path of moderation and personal freedom in Poland.

Thanks for listening. I'll be back next week. Let Poland be Poland. God bless you.

Note: The President spoke at 9:06 a.m. from Rancho del Cielo, his ranch near Santa Barbara, Calif

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